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White House Seeks Input on Information Safeguards

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WASHINGTON—The White House, criticized for lax security after the recent extraordinary string of spying arrests, has begun to seek congressional comment on 13 proposals to curb the unauthorized flow of classified information, including measures to toughen investigations of news media "leaks" and restrict photocopying of secret documents.

National Security Adviser Robert C. McFarlane will act on the recommendations in about a month and is expected to grant them "a fair degree of approval, if not complete approval," said Steven Garfinkel, head of the federal Information Security Oversight Office.

The proposals were sent Friday to 10 Senate and House committees with jurisdiction over classified materials, with a request that they comment before the year's end. None of the proposals would require congressional consent.

The measures, prepared for McFarlane by an 11-agency panel that included the CIA, the Justice Department and the military services, would largely revise a 1982 presidential order that itself had tightened restrictions on classified materials. They were drafted in the wake of last summer's Walker family spy arrests, which spurred a growing congressional debate over the supposedly wide leeway given the military and other agencies to classify and distribute government secrets.

The measures would address several criticisms raised during that debate, including "overclassification"—the tendency by officials to stamp too much material as secret for fear of accidentally releasing valuable data—and "overdistribution" policies that give too

many persons access to secrets.

A summary sent to the congressional committees acknowledges that some efforts to curb alleged abuses of the security system have failed to get results.

The summary concludes, for example, that many executive-branch agencies distribute classified material "on an automatic and recurring basis" without deciding whether readers need to know certain secrets. And it warns that programs giving some workers special access to secrets outside the normal security system have "proliferated" without internal controls.

Among other steps, the proposals would:

- "Encourage" agencies to place controls on photocopying of all classified material. Current rules restrict copying of "top secret" material but leave restrictions on lesser secrets to the discretion of the agencies involved.

- Order the attorney general to toughen the rules for investigating news media "leaks" because "current investigations . . . usually do not lead to successful prosecutions" of news sources.

- Require workers to report instances of improper classification of secrets, rather than giving them discretion on whether to do so, and set up a system to protect employees from retaliation for criticizing the classification system.

- Require all agencies to review the distribution of classified material at least annually.

Some of the same problems were cited two weeks ago in a Pentagon report that complained of sloppy controls on defense-related secrets and recommended strict new curbs on military employees' access to classified materials.